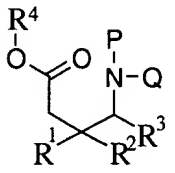
CLAIMS:

1. A compound of the formula (III)



(III)

in which:

P is hydrogen or methyl;

Q is a labile amine- or amide-forming organic group that becomes removed in the human or animal body;

R^1 is straight or branched $C_2 - C_6$ alkyl, $C_3 - C_6$ cycloalkyl or phenyl;

R^2 is hydrogen or methyl; and

R^3 is hydrogen, methyl or carboxyl; and

R^4 is hydrogen or a labile ester-forming group selected from substituted and unsubstituted $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl, benzyl and phenyl groups that become removed in the human or animal body,

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt of any salt-forming compound within the above class,

but excluding compounds in which R_1 is phenyl and R^2, R^3 and R^4 are each hydrogen.

2. The compound of claim 1, in which R^4 is hydrogen.

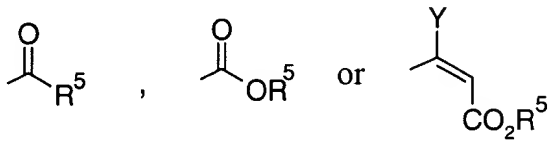
3. The compound of claim 1, in which R^4 is other than hydrogen and is more labile than Q.

4. The compound of claim 3, in which R^4 is methyl or *t*-butyl.

5. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q can be removed hydrolytically under physiological conditions.

6. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q can be removed enzymatically under physiological conditions.

7. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q is



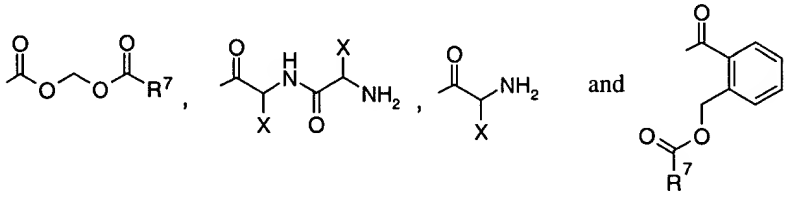
in which:

R^5 is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl, phenyl or benzyl in which the benzene ring may be substituted or unsubstituted; and

Y is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl, or $-CH_2CO_2R^6$ in which R^6 represents straight or branched chain $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl.

8. The compound of claim 7, wherein R^5 represents *t*-butyl, benzyl or phenyl.

9. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q is selected from

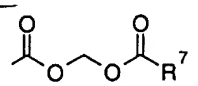


in which:

R^7 is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl, phenyl or benzyl in which either or each benzene ring may be substituted or unsubstituted; and

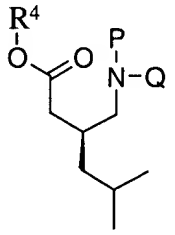
X represents a phenyl group or any of the side chains of the 20 naturally encoded α-amino acids.

10. The compound of claim 1, wherein Q is



wherein R^7 is methyl, *t*-butyl or phenyl.

11. A compound of the formula (IV)



(IV)

in which P, Q and R^4 have the meanings given in claim 1, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt of any salt-forming compound within the above class.

12. The compound of claim 11, in which R^4 is hydrogen.

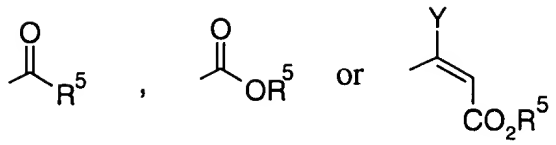
13. The compound of claim 11, in which R^4 is other than hydrogen and is more labile than Q.

14. The compound of claim 13, in which R^4 is methyl or *t*-butyl.

15. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q can be removed hydrolytically under physiological conditions.

16. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q can be removed enzymatically under physiological conditions.

17. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q is



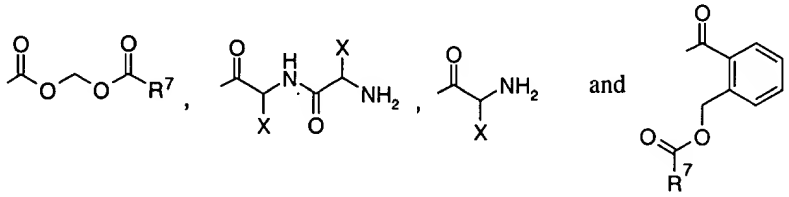
in which:

R^5 is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl, phenyl or benzyl in which the benzene ring may be substituted or unsubstituted; and

Y is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl, or $-CH_2CO_2R^6$ in which R^6 represents straight or branched chain $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl.

18. The compound of claim 17, wherein R^5 represents *t*-butyl, benzyl or phenyl.

19. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q is selected from

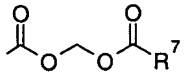


in which:

R^7 is hydrogen, straight or branched chain $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl, phenyl or benzyl in which either or each benzene ring may be substituted or unsubstituted; and

X represents a phenyl group or any of the side chains of the 20 naturally encoded α-amino acids.

20. The compound of claim 11, wherein Q is



wherein R^7 is methyl, *t*-butyl or phenyl.

21. A compound selected from

(S)-3-(Benzoylaminomethyl)-5-methylhexanoic acid;

(S)-Benzyl 3-(acylaminomethyl)-5-methylhexanoate;

(S)-3-[*N*-(acetoxymethyleneoxycarbonyl)aminomethyl]-5-methylhexanoic acid;

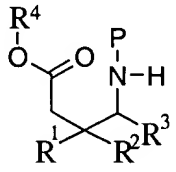
(S)-3-[*N*-((2,2-dimethylpropionyloxy)methyleneoxycarbonyl)-amino-methyl]-5-methylhexanoic acid;

(S)-3-[*N*-(benzoyloxymethyleneoxycarbonyl)aminomethyl]-5-methyl-hexanoic acid; and

pharmaceutically acceptable salts of any of the above.

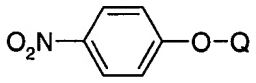
22. A method for making a compound of the formula (III) or salt thereof, as defined in claim 1, above, which comprises:

coupling a compound of the formula:



(V)

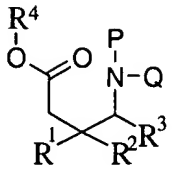
in which P and R^1 – R^4 have the meanings given in claim 1 and in which said compound is in the form of a free base or an ammonium salt with a compound of the formula



or QCl where Q has the meaning given in claim 1.

23. The method of claim 22, in which the compound (V) is a carboxylic acid and comprising the further step of esterifying the carboxyl group with a substituted or unsubstituted C_1 – C_6 alkanol, benzyl alcohol or phenol.

24. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier and a therapeutically effective amount of a compound of the formula (III)



(III)

in which:

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R^1 is straight or branched $C_2 - C_6$ alkyl, $C_3 - C_6$ cycloalkyl or phenyl;

R^2 is hydrogen or methyl; and

R^3 is hydrogen, methyl or carboxyl; and

R^4 is hydrogen or a labile ester-forming group selected from substituted and unsubstituted $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl, benzyl and phenyl groups that become removed in the human or animal body,

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt of any salt-forming compound within the above class,

but excluding compounds in which R_1 is phenyl and R^2, R^3 and R^4 are each hydrogen.

25. A method for treating epilepsy comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

26. A method for treating faintness attacks, hypokinesia and cranial disorders comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

27. A method for treating a neurodegenerative disorder comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

28. A method for treating depression comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

29. A method for treating anxiety comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

30. A method for treating panic comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

31. A method for treating pain comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

32. A method for treating a neuropathological disorder comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.

33. A method for treating digestive disorder comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound according to claim 1 to a human or animal in need of said treatment.